

THE CHURCH CLERK



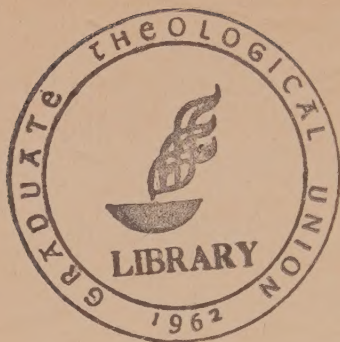
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The Church Clerk

A HANDBOOK

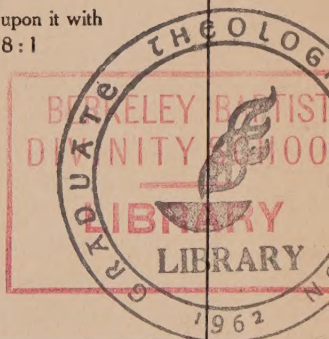
For Clerks of Baptist Churches

By

Zelotes Grenell

Take thee a great tablet and write upon it with
the pen of a man.—Isaiah 8 : 1

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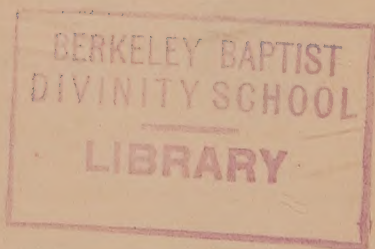
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PREFATORY

THERE are forty-seven thousand four hundred and nine Baptist church clerks in the United States, by the last count. That is to say, there are so many Baptist churches, according to the "American Baptist Year-Book" for 1908. Every one of these churches has a clerk. A church may have no pastor, no deacon, no trustee, no treasurer, no meeting-house, no services, but who ever knew of a Baptist church without a clerk? That is significant.

A church, organized on gospel lines, means life—life of the highest order; life means action, and worthy action is worth recording. Church action is recorded in lives finely influenced, and in cherished memories. The clerk's principal official care is to make a written record of it for preservation. Church business is the most important business done on earth. When it is pervaded by the right spirit its binding and loosing are ratified in heaven, an assurance that is given to no other organization however august and wise. The man who officially and faithfully records it renders no slight service.

The importance of that service becomes more manifest as the years pass. Long after it has been rendered, it is the subject of cordial praise for its

completeness or of expressed lament because it is plainly inexact or carelessly indistinct. There are old church records that are literally worth their weight in gold—nay, could not be bought for any sum that the most eager antiquarian would offer for them—held at so high value because they were well made and have the sanctity of age. They contain revered names and perpetuate the memory of transactions that are of historic value because those transactions reflect the spirit, thought, movement of their times. It is well that church clerks should often remind themselves that they are writing for posterity, and that they are leaving their intellectual and moral portraits on the pages they inscribe.

Another consideration heightens the significance of the work of this officer. He stands in intimate relation to the religious story of his day. The religious life of Americans is, in the main, denominational. Denominational statistics are studied diligently from time to time to ascertain in what direction and with what speed the Christian world is moving. It is important that the published statistics tell the truth. As to the Baptist denomination, the "Year-Book," issued by the American Baptist Publication Society of Philadelphia, is our most reliable source of information. How are its statistics made up? The editor of the "Year-Book" gets his information from the State Convention reports. The compilers of those reports make up their tables from the Association minutes. The clerks of the Associations

draw their figures from the letters of the churches, and the statistical parts of those letters are supplied by the church clerks. Thus the clerks of the churches are the springs whose rills of figures are gathered into the rivulets which in turn make the rivers that fill our statistical sea. Precision at the fountainheads makes for precision all the way through.

The intent of the following pages is twofold: (1) To rescue the office of church clerk from the too slight regard in which it is often held, by showing its large and varied requirements, its importance and worth; and (2) to help those who are trying to discharge its manifold and exacting duties.

DETROIT, January, 1909.

Z. G.

THE CHURCH CLERK

I

THE CHURCH CLERK CHOSEN

WHAT kind of a man should a church look for when a clerk is wanted? It is a serious question, especially when a church is being newly organized.

Too often there is no adequate looking. Some one says, "We ought to have a clerk," and he or some other casts an eye over the assembly, sees a bright-looking brother who is thought to be deserving of some prominence, and nominates him. Whereupon, as it might seem discourteous to propose more deliberation, the nomination is confirmed by vote.

Sometimes one is chosen clerk for his reputation as a penman; sometimes his general popularity elects him; and sometimes his selection is the bestowing of a cheap compliment, which may prove expensive in the end. The result of these haphazard methods is often good, for the office helps to make the officer; oftener the result is—— But there is a better way.

A Nominating Committee

It is well to have a committee of nomination. This committee should have time to study on

available men, to confer with the one they select and secure his promise of acceptance in the event of his election. Such a course gives dignity to the office, and braces the officer, causing him to recognize the fact that the office is no light affair.

If custom cuts out the method of a nominating committee, the pastor and leading brethren might constitute themselves a nominating committee, and arrange for the naming of the proper man at the right time.

Qualifications

What qualities should the committee seek? Of course, the clerk should be a member of the church; more, it is desirable that he should be among those who compose the faithful nucleus. The election of any man to any office in the church in the hope that thereby he will become interested in the general work is not practical. Observation has discovered that such a course more often sacrifices the office than it benefits the man. It is marriage for reform; an experiment as costly as it is futile.

While the clerk should be an active member of the church, eminent piety alone is not to be regarded as fitting a person for the place. Other things being equal, he will not be damaged by the highest attainments in grace; he will be benefited rather, and better qualified for his official duties. There are excellencies that piety will not supply. One may be very devout and yet make an entry in the church

book like this: "Peter Smith and wif was reseved for babtism."

Penmanship

Facility in the use of the pen is a highly desirable qualification in a church clerk. In the best clerical work there are three elements of nearly equal value. Naming them in the order of their importance, they are accuracy, clearness, and speed. The church clerk need not be a penman in the writing-school sense of the term, certainly not given to fancy curves and flourishes. Such strokes are as much out of place in the records of a church as they would be in a banker's accounts. But accuracy, putting the thing down correctly; clearness, putting it down in such shape that others may easily read and understand it; speed, putting it down at a good pace, these are highly important qualities of penmanship.

Spelling, Grammar, Punctuation

The church clerk should know how to spell, how to write grammatically, and be acquainted with the leading principles of punctuation. These are not matters of taste. They are necessary to truth-telling. They give interpretation to what is written. It is a well-known fact that legislation has been neutralized by a wrong point inserted by ignorance or carelessness. The mastery of these minor but essential matters is not difficult. The principles involved are few and simple, and are easily within reach of any

one who has had a common school training joined to carefulness and good sense.

Business Habits

Methodical habits, a sense of order, neatness, and promptness are desirable qualifications. Some are so well trained from childhood, in school and at home, that such habits have become fixed in early years—a capital preparation for the struggle of life. One who has had the advantage of a correct business training understands the importance of doing what is to be done with as much despatch as is consistent with thoroughness. But some who have not such training have what stands them in good stead, namely, a natural business faculty that impels to a prompt execution of affairs in hand. Whether it be by training or by native gifts of efficiency, there are men who are accustomed in their personal concerns to do things, and to do them right, and to do them on time. Such men are desirable in any office, and not least in that of church clerk.

The Artist Spirit

If, in addition to the qualities named, the clerk has something of the artist spirit, which leads him to take a decent pride in his work, he has a finishing trait of no little value. One who is glad to have his work seen even critically, who shows his tidy pages with pleasure, having a horror of blots and erasures, who turns off his work with a relish, can

be trusted with the books. They will not be banged about in his office or his home, nor used to help elevate the baby at table, nor loaned to Miss Marjorie for pressing flowers. They will be guarded with care. The papers will be sorted and labeled, and the whole work of the clerk will be finished and preserved.

The Right Age

From what has been said thus far it will be gathered that it is best that the church clerk be not too young, nor yet too old; not a youth and not a veteran, though of the two the latter were to be preferred. A man sufficiently advanced in years to possess a matured judgment, to have his habits of church attendance fixed, to be familiar with church and denominational principles and usages, to have achieved a reputation for business fidelity, to have acquired the judicial poise of mind so that no partisan feeling shall enter into his work, and yet not so old as to feel the duties of the office burdensome, is of about the right age. The number of one's years, while giving a helpful clue, will not be decisive. The matter of personal temperament enters in as a factor of considerable force. As has been often observed, some are older at twenty-five than others at forty, and some are younger at sixty than others at fifty. This, however, is worth keeping in mind, that service is what is to be desired—efficient, church-helping, God-honoring service. Every other

consideration should give place to that, whatever the matter to be decided.

Elect and Reelect

It is the custom in our churches to choose a clerk once a year. It is also the custom to reelect one who has been found competent and faithful. The principle of rotation in office, however it may work elsewhere, does not apply to offices in the church where offices are assigned not to reward or honor men, but to promote the service. The rotation principle certainly would be a misfit for the position of clerk, for in no other church office, save that of pastor, is experience more valuable. The good church clerk should be reelected annually as long as he can be useful. The voice of inspiration has declared that "they who have served well as deacons gain to themselves a good standing and great boldness in the faith." And the clerk is a deacon—a servant—though he is seldom given the scriptural title that belongs to him. The "good standing" he gains is the respect and admiration of those who speak of "our clerk" in tones of commendation. The "great boldness in the faith" he wins is the outcome of his familiarity with matters pertaining to the church and the denomination.

Clerical Women

In some of our smaller churches, especially in the West, there is a growing custom of choosing the

clerks from among the sisters. This may be done advantageously where the qualifications exist. The inspired apostle denied to women any function of authority in the church; but the position of clerk is not one of authority. Quite otherwise, it is one of service, one under direction. What has been said already and what may yet be said in the following pages, though pertaining, as expressed, to one sex, will apply equally to both.

II

THE CLERK AS A RECORD MAKER

THE records of a church are its autobiography, written at its dictation by its amanuensis. But they are more than an interesting story. They mark the pathway along which the church has come in its development and growth. They retain, in convenient form for reference, what it wishes to be able to recall for its information and future guidance.

Importance of the Records

Church business is important. In one view—perhaps the truest view—it is the most important business done on earth. It is the action of a body of disciples of Christ applying the laws of Christ to the affairs of his kingdom and for its advancement. If church business is important, it is of almost equal importance that a faithful record should be made of it and that the record should be preserved. For many items of church action look to the future. Without the reliable record its transactions would ere long be a fading and divergent memory—a matter of tradition—and we all know how much, or rather how little, tradition is worth.

Accuracy Essential

It is a prime essential that the records should be accurate—which is simply saying that they should tell the exact truth. An imperfect account of correct business has the same effect as a perfect account of incorrect business. It is a misrepresentation of, and may be a reproach to, the church. Also it fails of the purpose for which the records are made and kept.

Facilities Should be Furnished

In view of the foregoing suggestions, it follows that the clerk, in addition to the possession of the qualifications mentioned in the preceding chapter, should have facilities for doing his work. He should have a place of his own when the church is in business session, a seat and a table near the moderator's chair, where he can see and hear all. He should take his place as soon as the call to order is given, if not before. Thus it will be known that he is present, and he will be convenient to the moderator to receive special direction or to confer with him at his request; and he will be where he may best be seen and heard if he has papers or minutes to read.

The "Pro Tem." Clerk

If the clerk is not present, and there is no assistant clerk present, the first business is the election of a clerk *pro tempore*, as the phrase is, meaning "for the time," usually written and spoken "pro tem." The

person thus appointed should promptly take the clerk's place, and perform all his duties for that session. If the clerk should enter during the session, the *pro tem.* clerk should, at the first pause, offer to surrender the place to its regular occupant, which offer the standing clerk may accept or decline at his discretion, unless advised by the moderator or directed by the assembly. But the clerk entering after a *pro tem.* substitute has been selected should not insist upon the place and service. If the clerk discovers beforehand that he is likely to be absent from a business session, he should inform his assistant—or, if he has none, the moderator—that there may be no delay in providing a substitute. He is not at liberty to deputize any one to take his place, for the office is not his in the sense that he may pass it around, though he may very properly suggest a name.¹

Making the Minutes

The minutes of a meeting may be made with a pencil on numbered sheets, or in a soft paper blank book provided for that purpose, and should not be transcribed into the record book until they have been approved by the church, or by a standing committee appointed for such service.

¹ If the clerk is accessible, the *pro tem.* clerk should at the earliest opportunity place in his hand the notes of the meeting, and not attempt to fill the office beyond the session for which he was appointed. If the clerk's absence is prolonged, as in the case of sickness or out-of-townness, the *pro tem.* clerk should seek instruction as to the will of the church.

Brevity

The minutes should be as brief as is consistent with clearness. Take for example, this entry: It was moved by Brother Abram Brown and seconded by Brother Charles DeWitt and carried unanimously that Miss Evelyn Hope be granted a letter of dismission and commendation at her own request, through the pastor, and approved by the Advisory Committee, to unite with the First Baptist Church of Thyatira." While the entry is exact, it were better to omit the mention of all that is customary and that would be taken for granted. Eliminating the redundant features in the minute, it would read: "Miss Evelyn Hope was dismissed to the First Baptist Church of Thyatira"—twelve words, instead of fifty. Such brevity is a great time-saver both for the clerk and the church.

Recording Motions and Votes

The names of those who make and second motions are not recorded, except in business of unusual significance. Nor is it advisable to record the number of votes given for and against proposed measures, unless it is so ordered. Unhappily many members of Baptist churches fail to discharge the duty of voting save on occasions of exceptional interest, so that a record of the numbers voting pro and con would seldom be a fair representation of the mind of the entire church. Lost motions are not recorded, unless the assembly otherwise directs. Resolutions

disposed of in any other way than by being voted down, are recorded for future reference.

No Compliments or Criticisms

In making his records, the discreet clerk avoids the use of descriptive terms, whether complimentary or otherwise. "Brother Peter Peterson spoke eloquently in favor of the plan." "Brother Robert Robertson convincingly denounced the proposed measure." "After a tender prayer by the pastor, adjourned." All such entries are unsuited to the records. They reflect the clerk's state of mind, which may be a very good state of mind; but church records are not designed to mirror the clerk's moods and opinions.

Business Meetings

The custom of having monthly church meetings for business only is happily passing away. They are seldom a means of grace, save as they try charity and patience. The annual meeting, which puts the routine business of the church into the hands of standing committees, with quarterly reports to maintain the interest, well supplants the monthly business session. It is understood in our best organized churches that the end of the midweek meeting is a good time to dispose of any little items that require attention. Matters then introduced of so serious import as to demand deliberation are committed to discreet members present to be digested and then

reported to the church with matured advice.¹ Of course, special meetings for business are appointed when matters of unusual importance need to be considered in committee of the whole.

Reading the Minutes

In the usage of churches that hold monthly business sessions, the reading of the minutes of the previous meeting comes immediately after the opening prayer. Is that the best place? The minutes are read for two reasons: (1) For approval—involving correction; (2) that the business of the preceding session may be in mind. But it would seem that the best time for reading the minutes for approval is at the close of the session, if there is no committee authorized to examine, correct, and approve them. And as for calling to mind the transactions of the former session, there is no need of that unless some matters were postponed, which the clerk would have listed in form.

Making the Records

Coming now to the actual making of the records, here are a few suggestions:

1. The book should be made for that purpose, of best writing-paper, well bound, and with pages from seven to eight inches wide with proportionate length.

¹ Well-organized churches refuse to consider innovations that have not been passed upon in committee. Projects, however plausible and popular, are put in the hands of competent persons, both sides being represented if sides have developed; they report and advise, and discussion and decision follow.

It should be thick enough to hold the records for twenty or thirty years. The firm binding should be insisted on, for not a few church books lose their earliest leaves before the last are filled.¹

2. The clerk uses ink of a permanent black, or a writing fluid that becomes a fadeless black. Fancy-colored inks and home-made dilutions are to be eschewed as Job eschewed evil.

3. In transcribing minutes to the record book, the clerk will adhere to the forms of expression approved by the church or committee when they were read for approval, varying from them only for the correction of superficial errors in grammar, spelling, etc.

4. He will also, for convenience of reference, make brief marginal notations, for which purpose there is generally found in blank record books a space ruled off at the left side of each page.

5. He will also see to it that each separate item of business has a paragraph to itself.

As an illustration, a sample page is given:

September 2, 1908.

The church was convened for business session at the close of the midweek meeting.

Pastor Goodman in the chair.

Deacon Abram Myers led in prayer.

¹ The "loose leaf," which is coming into use in mercantile book-keeping, is used also for records. It has the advantage of admitting the use of the typewriter, which economizes space and usually makes a clearer and more pleasing impression on the eye. Whether this advantage compensates for the additional care involved is for those who try it to determine.

E. G. Laws *Ephraim G. Laws made confession of his
received for* *faith in Christ, and upon recommendation of
baptism* *the Advisory Committee was received for
baptism.*

New hymn *W. D. Robbins offered the following:
books* *"Resolved that we ought to have new
hymn books for use in our social meetings,"
which was referred to the Music Committee,
with instructions to report in one week.*

*After the approval of the above minutes,
adjourned with benediction by the pastor.*

I. Wright, Clerk.

September 9, 1908.

*After the regular prayer meeting the
church convened for business.*

*In the absence of the pastor, Deacon
Harvey Otis was called to the chair.*

Robert Thompson led in prayer.

R. R. Martin *Richard R. Martin and his wife (Mary)
and wife* *were received to membership on credit of a
received* *letter from the church in Rosendale.*

Report on *The Music Committee reported through
new hymn* *its chairman, E. M. Brigham, recommending
books* *that new hymn books be provided for the
midweek meetings. The committee was in-
structed to examine books prepared for such
purpose, and to recommend the one they
considered the best.*

*After above minutes were approved, ad-
journed with prayer by Deacon Andrew
Near.*

I. Wright, Clerk.

September 14, 1908.

The church convened for regular monthly business.

Pastor Goodman in the chair.

D. A. Waterman led in prayer.

In the absence of the Clerk, N. B. Ackley was chosen clerk pro tem.

+ Delegates to the Association Church on the 15th inst.: A. H. Wilkinson, J. C. Gates, H. H. James, and Seymour Finney, with the pastor, with the power to appoint alternates if any of those appointed are unable to attend.

Association letter Appointed the pastor and clerk a committee to prepare the letter to the Association.

Ten dollars for minutes Instructed the treasurer to pay to the treasurer of the Association ten dollars for minutes, and to pay the pastor's traveling expenses to and from Smyrna.

The proposed evangelism Deacon G. B. Simons reported for the committee appointed last month to consider the proposal that we engage the services of an evangelist: That we first seek a new consecration of the whole church under the leadership of our pastor, and then, if deemed advisable, consider the engagement of an evangelist. Report adopted. Adjourned with prayer by J. E. Howard.

N. B. Ackley, Clerk, pro tem.

I. Wright, Clerk.

What of It?

Many will see nothing remarkable in these sample minutes, and will query why space was given them. They are not inserted as remarkable. Startling items might have been invented. But the form of these simple entries may be helpful to church clerks who wish to know how. The writer hazards the opinion that an examination of church records the country over would discover that not one in twenty of them illustrates the plain principles here shown, namely, compact expression, paragraphic division, and marginal references.

III

THE CHURCH CLERK AS RECORD KEEPER

THE safekeeping of the church records is next to, and not far behind, the well-making of them. They are made that they may be preserved. And the longer they are kept the more valuable do they become.

For Safe Keeping

The careful clerk guards the books and papers entrusted to him against damage and loss. Loose papers are especially apt to go astray. The original Territorial charter of the First Baptist Church of Detroit, an interesting and valuable document, supposed to be lost, was found in a barrel of rubbish in the cellar of the church. The best way to preserve important papers is to make an attested copy of them in the record book in addition to folding, wrapping, and docketing them. A fireproof safe is none too good for church books and papers. Some churches provide such receptacles. In the lack of so well-protected a place, a desk or drawer or box large enough to hold the clerk's books and files and blanks, and devoted to that single purpose, would render fair service.

The Membership Roll

As part of the record keeping, the church clerk makes a list of the names of the members of the church, and promptly notes therein any changes that occur in the enrolment. This will be official. It should be tabular in form, and give in the most concise manner the name, the time, and manner of union with the church, and the time and manner of departure from it. The following will illustrate:

Members of the First Baptist Church of Ephesus

Date and Manner of Union		Names	Manner and Date of Departure		
June 15, 1875	Constituent Members	Arnold, Mary A.	Died	Oct. 19, 1877	
		Bennett, John G.			
		Bennett, Lucy (Mrs. J. G.)	Let	Jan. 5, 1885	
		Cox, Jeremiah			
		Cox, Anna (Mrs. J.)	Let	Jan. 5, 1885	
		Davis, Sarah (Mrs. G. B.)			
		Evans, Peter	Died	Sept. 22, 1889	
		Evans, Rosa (Mrs. P.)			
		Fish, Solomon	Era	May 17, 1878	
		Gurley, May (Mrs. H. H.)			
		Hall, George	Era	May 17, 1878	
		Hall, Emma (Mrs. Geo.)			
		Ideal, Imogen	Exc	Nov. 2, 1876	
		Jackson, Henry L.			
Knight, Washington	Later	Mrs. P. P.			
Holt, William					
July 5, 1875	Let	Holt, Maria (Mrs. Wm.)	Queen	Died	Jan. 17, 1877
July 5, 1875	Let	Peters, Henry A.			
Aug. 10, 1875	Bap	Peters, Hannah (Mrs. H. A.)	Let	May 2, 1877	
Aug. 10, 1875	Bap	Cross, Eunice (Mrs. I. R.)			
Aug. 10, 1875	Bap	Isaacs, Ira	Let	May 2, 1877	
Sept. 15, 1875	Exp	Bennett, Harriet			
Oct. 14, 1875	Let	Pope, Silas T.	Let	May 2, 1877	
Oct. 14, 1875	Let	Pope, Jane (Mrs. S. T.)			
Nov. 11, 1875	Let	Stevens, Mrs. Susan			

Pointers

Attention is directed to the following points in the foregoing list:

1. There are no dittos. Every line is complete in itself. If erasures occur, the dittoed lines are likely to remain uncorrected and become misleading. The ditto mark, or contraction, is a labor-saving device happily appropriate in some places, but not in such a list. When Mrs. Holt has occasion to look through the membership roll she will see herself fitly recorded, and not as a "do." name, received at "do." date, in "do." manner.

2. The surname is placed first in each instance, because that is most distinctly in mind in looking up names.

3. No pet names or contractions are admitted. Harriet Bennett is not entered as "Hattie," though she is so called by "everybody"; and "Wash." Knight, as he is familiarly known, appears on the church roll in all the glory of his illustrious syllables.

4. The definitive "Miss" is not used. Every married woman is recorded as "Mrs.," and that distinguishes the maidens.

5. The married sister has her own first name recorded, with her husband's initials following in parentheses.

6. The widow is indicated by the "Mrs." preceding her first name, as in the last line of the foregoing specimen.

7. When a maiden member becomes a wife, her married name is inserted in close proximity to her maiden name. In the alphabetical list, soon to be mentioned, a different arrangement is needed.

8. There is no call to erase a name or draw a line through it to indicate that it ceases to belong on the list. Such treatment disfigures the page, and may so blur the name that future identification of it is rendered difficult or impossible. The fact that entries appear in the right hand spaces is a sufficiently plain indication that the name is not to be counted.

The Alphabetical List

The chronological list, usually made in the latter end of the record book (in many instances too few pages are allowed for that purpose) is the official roll of the church. If it is maintained properly and kept up to date, it will never need to be revised. But the enterprising clerk makes another list, in another book, in which the names are arranged in alphabetical order, which will need to be rewritten as often as many changes render it unsatisfactory. In this list the same distinctive points are observed as in the chronological list (see preceding paragraphs under "Pointers"). Save that when a maiden marries, her new name is placed under its proper letter. Some churches print the alphabetical list with addresses once a year, or oftener, as a means of information to their members.

Yet Another List

In cities and large towns it is found extremely helpful to church work to have a record of members' names arranged by street and number. This facilitates pastoral calls and solicitation, while it also (if printed) promotes acquaintance among neighboring members. Some churches print this instead of the alphabetical list. It certainly is a better aid to church work.

Filed Reports

As record keeper the church clerk not only files accepted reports, neatly folding, labeling, and wrapping them, but also preserves copies of all prints issued under church authorization. More still, he will preserve copies of the annual minutes of the Association and the State Convention with which the church is connected, for these are in fact part of the records of the church.

IV

THE CLERK AS HISTORIAN

THE church clerk has a function not usually included in a definition of his duties, but which belongs to him as to none other. That function may be called for want of a better term, his work as the historian of the church. He not only records the business, but tells the history of the church.

Church Life More Than "Business"

It is true that the clerk is writing history in attending to records, rolls, and correspondence. Any of these may become choice historic material. Yet there are facts in the church life that do not come under any of these categories—facts that do not come into the church "business"—facts of sufficient force perceptibly to modify or accentuate its spirit. If they are not set down for preservation they will soon be forgotten. If the clerk has the gift of his office, he will make timely note of these events in the church records. They will appear interspersed with the more formal minutes. They may not be read for approval, but they will be approved by all who have occasion to examine the book in after times.

Illustrative

The intent of these suggestions may be best shown by a few illustrations taken from the records of the First Baptist Church of Ephesus.

December 16, 1889.

At the close of the sermon last Sunday evening, the pastor announced an after-meeting. Almost all the congregation remained, and near the end of it seventeen persons indicated by rising their first acceptance of Christ as Saviour and Lord.

July 15, 1890.

John J. Goodman, the eldest son of our pastor, whom the church has aided during his course of studies in preparing for the work of the ministry, was ordained pastor of the First Baptist Church of Pergamum on the 11th inst., his father preaching the ordination sermon.

January 17, 1891.

Rev. Dr. David Downie, for many years one of our missionaries in Southern India, occupied the pulpit last Sunday morning. It was the time for our annual offering for foreign missions, and there was collected in cash and pledges nearly two hundred and seventy-five dollars, the largest amount we have given at one time to that cause.

March 14, 1891.

Last night the burning of a dwelling adjoining our church property set fire to our house. Though but partially consumed, the organ was quite destroyed. Loss is fully covered by insurance. (See scrapbook.)

September 3, 1891.

The pastor's family having been installed in the parsonage built for them, a house-warming was given by the

church last evening. Neighboring pastors were present and added much to pleasure of the occasion. (See scrapbook.)

It is evident that such entries, with others that make mention of pulpit supplies in pastoral vacations, revivals, festival occasions, etc., must add interest to the records and piece out the story of the church life without the too frequent necessity of "reading between the lines."

A Call for Discretion

In this part of the service special discretion is demanded. There will be a tendency to spin it out at too great length, particularly in reference to matters that have awakened the personal interest of the clerk. When an event has occurred that is not clearly entitled to record, it might be well for the clerk to consult the pastor or some other judicious adviser before making the entry. Let him put himself in fancy at a time-distance from the occurrence and ask himself, "How will this appear to the reader of these pages thirty or forty years from now?" Then, if the entry is made, let it be as tersely phrased as may be consistent with clearness and completeness.

The Scrapbook

Reference was made in two of the foregoing illustrative paragraphs to a scrapbook. Though it is by no means required that the church clerk should keep

and use such an adjunct to his office as record maker and record keeper, the ideal clerk who magnifies his office will find it a useful and interesting supplement to the records. Here and there an unofficial member of the church is found who has a scrapbook for the insertion of clippings from the newspapers bearing upon the affairs of the church to which he belongs. Why should not the clerk do that very thing—not as a personal possession, but as appertaining to his office? And not alone items clipped from the local prints, but also references to the church in the religious papers would find a place in the church scrapbook. Pictures of the house of worship, of the pastor, and of prominent members would there be inserted. Likewise there might be pasted therein copies of cards of church services, lists of special topics, etc. Long after the clerk's diligent hands have turned to dust his work will be examined with intensest interest, and he will be praised for his fidelity as the historian of the church he served.

V

THE CLERK AS CORRESPONDENT

OCCASIONALLY is found a church that appoints a correspondence or assistant clerk as well as a clerk of records. In large churches this is a well-made division of labor, but almost universally there is but one clerk. What is said in this chapter will apply in either case.

A Common Fault

Much church correspondence is carried on by the use of printed blanks, which need only to be filled and despatched. Something will be said in the next chapter as to church blanks. Just a caution here as to one point in the use of them. Perhaps the commonest fault of church clerks in official correspondence is that of dilatoriness in issuing letters of dismissal to members at a distance. Usually some time elapses—especially where churches have business sessions but once a month—between the application for dismissal and action on it, and if there is delay beyond that, the expectant applicant is annoyed. In the silence that follows his request he becomes apprehensive that his standing has somehow become impaired and, worse still, he fears he is discredited in his new location where he has told that

his letter has been sent for. If church clerks realized in how many instances the transference of membership is a nerve-trying experience they would be careful to render the process smooth and expeditious.¹

Matter of Courtesy

Some of the letters of dismissal that come to the hands of the clerk have attached return blanks certifying to the reception of the party named, and they should be promptly filled, sealed, and posted. But whether such return blanks are supplied or not, the clerk of the receiving church should at once inform the clerk of the dismissing church of the reception of the dismissed member, thus completing the transference—a matter of courtesy as well as of business thoroughness.

As to Letter Writing

Every church clerk has more or less frequent occasion to write official letters. He will honor his office and his church by doing the best possible in this line, showing the same qualities of precision as in making the records. He will be brief without being brusque, and will exhibit a Christian spirit without lapsing into sanctimoniousness. The writer has seen a letter written by a church clerk, who evidently had run short of suitable paper, and

¹ One of the most profuse leakages in the churches of the Baptist order and a fruitful source of damage to Christian character is due to the failure to impress upon removing members the importance of a speedy transference of membership.

resorted to the only kind at hand, a black-edged mourning sheet. In the course of the letter he explained that the paper represented his state mind over the condition of the church—an afterthought more ingenious than frank. Many churches have printed letter-heads for their official correspondence, with their principal officers' names in plain sight—a helpful arrangement, guarding against misapprehension of signatures.

In General

As correspondence officer, the clerk will issue letters of dismissal and certificates of standing, as ordered by the church, will notify all officers of their election, and will inform the first-named of every committee of the composition of the committee and its province, quoting the resolution or motion under which it was appointed. Unless the pulpit committee has a secretary of its own, the clerk will, as instructed, invite supplies during pastoral vacations and conduct correspondence with a view to pastoral settlement when the church is pastorless. He will also notify persons under discipline of any church action touching them. In all this, courtesy, clearness, and a decent brevity are essential to the best work.

The Letter to the Association

We now come to one of the most significant and far-reaching functions of the church clerk as cor-

respondent, namely, his customary share in the composition of the annual letter to the Association. In most churches the pastor and clerk are appointed a committee to prepare the letter. It is understood that there is a division of labor—the pastor writing the account of the distinctive features of the church life during the year, the clerk supplying the statistical figures as to membership and finance. It would seem a simple matter to run the eye over the membership list and compute the additions and diminutions, and not a very serious task to put together the treasurer's figures for expenses and benevolent contributions; but Association clerks often find in church letters so many attempts to amend the figures by erasures and interlinings as to tax their ingenuity and patience. There seems to be in some church clerks a temperamental tendency to guess instead of compute, and in others a fondness for round numbers that puts to flight any lingering sense of exactness.

As to Membership

An illustrative instance may serve here. The writer once heard a church letter read at an Association meeting¹ in which the membership figures ran somewhat as follows: "Number reported last

¹ There was a time when the reading of letters from the churches was esteemed one of the most interesting exercises of Association meetings. It evoked those sympathies which attest and strengthen fellowship. That was before such meetings became so largely business sessions and speedy adjournment was so imperative a demand as now.

year, seventy-six ; added by baptism, eight ; by letter, twelve ; present number, one hundred." The reading clerk raised his eyebrows and many in the assembly audibly smiled. Later a conversation like this may be imagined to have occurred between the writer of the letter and the reading clerk :

"What did the people laugh at?"

"At your figures."

"What was there amusing about them?"

"Why, you reported last year seventy-six members and added twenty, and said you now have a hundred."

"I'll tell you how that was. Four persons in one family that we crossed off last year because we had lost track of them have come back."

"You should have reported them as restored."

"But they haven't been restored yet ; they're going to be at the next covenant meeting."

"You should report facts, not expectations."

"We never had so many as a hundred before, and we're mighty glad to get up to that notch."

As to Finances

Here is an opportunity wide open for errors of all sorts, and it is often used. In some churches accounts are kept so loosely that the guesser has as fine a chance as the reckoner. However that may be in any given instance, the clerk, in making up the financial statement, accepts the figures given him by the treasurer, unless he is aware of palpable

errors, which he will amend with the treasurer's consent. And there are in most of our churches several treasurers to be consulted—those of the Sunday-school, the women's societies, the young people's organization, and often yet others, as well as *the* treasurer. The figures thus received the clerk combines under their suitable heads, and tests the footings before he transfers them to the letter proper.

Some Other Items

There are occasional items that do not appear in the accounts of the treasurer which may properly have place in the reported contributions of the church. There are those who are desirous of having their names appear as contributors in the reports of our denominational societies, and, instead of sending their offerings through the hands of the treasurer as part of the church contribution, they send direct to the society. Thus the Master's law of privacy in almsgiving is disobeyed and the church treasury is dishonored. The clerk should have liberty to include such contributions in the reported benevolence of the church. Instances have been known in which bequests of deceased persons have been reported as part of the church contributions. It is doubtful if such gifts can be properly so considered, for these offerings become effective only after the donors have left the church to join a better assembly.

VI

THE CHURCH CLERK'S BLANKS

PRINTED sheets, with spaces left for dates, names, and signatures, are a convenience, especially in large churches where they are often called into use—letters of dismissal, for example. But they are not an absolute necessity in any church, serving rather to give an air of distinction and up-to-dateness than to save time and labor for the clerk. The church that does not use them is no less entitled to consideration than one that has them in ornamental variety. Indeed, a well-written letter of dismissal, wholly pen-work, has a certain advantage in that it impresses the reader as less perfunctory and more fraternal than the other sort. Print veils personality.

Blanks in General

The following suggestions are offered touching the general style of printed blanks. Good writing-paper should be used, of course. The print may be in Roman, Italic, or script type, but not so ornamental as to put the filled-in writing out of countenance. The printer should be instructed to have the lines far enough apart and the blank spaces roomy enough to admit of the free use of the pen for the

longest date and the most extended name. The clerk, in using blanks, is sometimes cramped for space.

For Letters of Dismission

This is the most frequent use for church blanks. Following is the form in common use—filled in for purpose of illustration.

*The First Baptist Church of Flint, Maine,
to the*

Washington Avenue

Baptist Church of Bluegrasstown, Ky., Greeting:

Dear Brethren: This is to certify that our beloved Brother, Archibald T. Comstock, is a member of this church, and at his own request is dismissed, that he may unite with you. We affectionately commend him to your fellowship.

Done by order of the church the 3rd day of May, 1908.

This letter is good for six months.

Solomon Portal, Church Clerk.

Observations

1. The words underscored are those that are written in.
2. The name of the church addressed is written in full, not as "Wash'n Ave."
3. "In good standing," which sometimes follows the words "is a member of this church," is omitted; for it is preposterous to think that a member not in good standing would be dismissed to a sister church.

4. Occasionally one sees a church letter which has, following the name of the church issuing it, the name of the pastor, but why the pastor's name should appear in that connection it is not easy to comprehend.

5. The intention in the form given is that a separate letter be issued to each member of a family when several members of a family are dismissed at the same time.

6. Sometimes, in addition to the appended words, "This letter is valid for six months," there is a request to sign, date, and return the enclosed (or attached) paper which reads, as per foregoing sample:

To the First Baptist Church of Flint, Maine, Greeting:

This is to inform you that Brother Archibald T. Comstock was received into the fellowship of this church upon credit of your letter on the 14th day of June, 1908.

Henry P. Dalton,

*Clerk of Washington Avenue Baptist Church of Blue-
grasstown, Ky.*

Certificate of Standing

It sometimes occurs that an esteemed member of a Baptist church wishes to withdraw from the membership on account of a change of belief or for some reason not disclosed, and persists in that desire despite all attempts to retain him. It once was the custom to "take up labor" with such a member, and if that did not avail, to subject him to the discipline

of a trial which was more than likely to lead to his exclusion. We have found a better way. The voluntary principle holds, and as he joined on his own motion, he should be allowed to depart without opprobrium if he has been fairly faithful to his obligations. In such cases it is customary to give him a certificate of standing, and place opposite his name on the membership roll the word "dismissed," or the word, "erased," as the church may order. The certificate runs somewhat as follows:

The.....Baptist Church of.....to whom it may concern: This is to certify that..... has been a member of this church in good standing up to this date, and that.....membership ceases by..... own desire.

*Done by order of the church the....day of....., 19....
....., Church Clerk.*

Delegate's Certificate

The wholesome custom of requiring certificates of delegates to deliberative denominational assemblies is an increasing imperative. Such certificates should be supplied whether demanded by such assemblies or not. They deepen the sense of responsibility, which has long been too shallow, and when demanded their absence is embarrassing. Ecclesiastical councils, district Associations, State Conventions, and the Southern and Northern Baptist Conventions are delegated bodies; not that the churches confer authority upon their delegates, but that those sent are understood to

represent the prevailing sentiments of the churches sending them. The letter to the Association usually contains the names of a church's delegates, and no other credentials are needed in such cases, but for councils and conventions, certificates should be issued to the church's representatives. They will run something like this:

This is to certify that..... is delegated to represent the..... Baptist Church of..... in the.....sitting at.....on the..... day of....., 19....

Dated.....

....., Church Clerk.

The above form is for an individual certificate. When delegates go in company, a joint certificate may suffice.

A Summons to Trial

Seldom is the church clerk called upon to issue a formal summons to a refractory member to come before the church for trial, and when occasion presents he feels it to be a delicate business. Of course, such judicial proceedings are in order only after other and private means have failed to induce repentance and amendment. But sometimes there is no alternative, and the church must apply the law of Christ as illustrated in apostolic practice. Then it becomes the duty of the clerk to address the accused in a formal line something like the following:

.....

Dear Brother:

You are hereby summoned to come before the church, at its usual place of worship, on the..... day of..... next, at o'clock, p. m., to answer to the following charges and specifications:

(Charges and specifications follow in order.)

It is hoped that you may be able to meet this appointment, or indicate to me promptly a day and hour more convenient to yourself.

Done by order of the church. (Date.)

....., Church Clerk.

To give the accused the choice of a day and hour more convenient to himself than that appointed by the church has not a strictly judicial air, but it is Christian. In all church transactions of this class, as in all others, courtesy, kindness, and patience are good investments.

Notice of Excommunication

It was once the custom in some parts to announce from the pulpit the names of those who had put themselves outside of the fellowship of the church. A simpler way has been found; that is to let the excluded party learn of it by rumor, or by chance—a less offensive and more doubtful way. The excommunicated should be officially notified of the action of the church. Naturally it falls to the clerk of the church to give him the information. Here,

again, is an opportunity to exhibit the Christian spirit. It may be done in some such terms as these:

.....

.....

Dear Brother:

It is my unhappy duty to tell you that at a meeting of the church, held on the.....day of.....last, the church withdrew the hand of fellowship from you by formal vote, its judgment being that the charge of unchristian conduct made against you was sustained by adequate proof. We shall hope and pray that you may be led to see your fault and return to us. For be assured that a cordial welcome awaits you upon your repentance, confession, and amendment of life,

Very truly yours,

....., Church Clerk.

(Date.)

Objection may be made to addressing an excluded person as "brother," for a pastor has been known to complain that church discipline was neutralized by the "brothering" of such a one. But we have Paul's example for calling "brethren" violent opposers of the gospel (Acts 22 : 1). True, Jesus says respecting an excluded man, "Let him be unto thee as the Gentile and the publican." And what should be our attitude toward Gentiles and outcasts if not that of conciliation and winningness? It frequently occurs that the member under discipline has scorned the church and its efforts to reclaim him and otherwise acted in an exasperating

manner, but that does not annul Christ's law of kindness to "the unthankiul and the evil."

A Traveling Letter

Formerly it was quite the vogue for a church-member leaving home for distant and prolonged travel, to carry with him credentials of his church relations, to be used if necessary. The pastor and clerk would issue a traveling letter when called for in some such terms as these:

To whom it may concern:

This is to certify that is a member of the..... Baptist Church of....., and is affectionately commended to the Christian courtesy and fellowship of all who love our Lord.

....., Pastor.

....., Clerk.

(Date.)

Conclusion

From the foregoing suggestions it will be gathered that the official work of the church clerk is more than mechanical, more than intellectual, and has in it a spiritual element. If this officer will add to his clear and tidy penmanship fidelity, and to fidelity discretion, and to discretion the graces of the Spirit, he will serve his generation well. Good is it to represent the usages of well-bred society; better is it to represent the highest intelligence and piety of the church; best of all is it to reproduce the spirit of the Christ.

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